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BODY:

Feds secure \$1.5 million to quadruple water supply

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The federal government has pumped \$1.5 million into east Central Florida to help quadruple the amount of drinking water pulled from Taylor Creek Reservoir in the next six years.

The project would expand the reservoir -- near the St. Johns River and State Road 520 in Cocoa -- to 36 million gallons a day by 2010.

The water could go to several east Central Florida utilities, including Cocoa, Titusville and Orange County.

Cocoa, which operates the reservoir, draws about 9 million gallons a day from the manmade tributary of the St. Johns River.

The \$137 million expansion includes \$78 million to build a treatment plant and divert river water to the reservoir, and about \$59 million for water lines.

"It would be able to contain two more feet of water," said Ed Garland, a spokesman for the St. Johns River Water Management District.

On Wednesday, U.S. Rep. David Weldon presented a check to water management district officials. Weldon helped secure the money through the State and Tribal Assistance Grants Program.

Regional water planners want utilities to tap the St. Johns River and the reservoir to supplement groundwater. They say groundwater won't meet all the region's future water supply needs without damaging lakes, springs and wetland ecosystems.

The river's downstream ecosystem needs about 20 million gallons a day.

"It's just another tool in the toolbox," Ed Wegerif, deputy director of utilities for Cocoa, said of the project. "A lot of conceptualizing needs to take place."

Cocoa uses about 28 million gallons a day, about 2/3 from wells and the rest from the reservoir. By 2020, the city expects to need 40 million daily gallons.

The utilities plan to meet in October to talk about future funding sources and each utility's water supply needs.

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